Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/01/18 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000200760006-4

WASHINGTON TIMES
4 November 1985

Marcos says he'll set vote soon to quiet detractors

By Tom Breen
THE WASHINGTON TIMES FOREIGN SERVICE

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos, taking the offensive against increasing U.S. criticism of his administration, said yesterday he would call a special election for president in January 1986 to settle "fundamental issues," including his own popularity.

"Well I understand the opposition has been asking for an election. In answer to their request, I announce that I am ready to call a snap election perhaps earlier than eight months, perhaps three months or less," Mr. Marcos said on the American network ABC-TV's "This Week With David Brinkley."

ABC producer Bill Thomas said Mr. Marcos told him after the interview the election could be held Jan. 17, the anniversary of the 1981 lifting of eight years of martial law. But Mr. Marcos said an exact date for the proposed election was not expected before next week, Mr. Thomas said.

Mr. Marcos was impressive in the interview, displaying his accumulated political savvy and a knack for utilizing — if not manipulating — the television medium.

Although the election question and response appeared spontaneous, Malacanang Palace in Manila and the Philippine Embassy in Washington issued background statements shortly after the program was carried live at midnight Sunday in Manila — midday yesterday in Washington.

"All this childish claims to popularity on both sides have to be settled," said Mr. Marcos, 68, who has held power for 20 years. Mr. Marcos hinted in August that he might call an early election after opposition lawmakers in the National Assembly announced they would seek his impeachment for corruption.

When the governing party crushed the impeachment measure, Mr. Marcos dropped the idea of early balloting.

"I think we have to settle it by calling an election right now," Mr. Marcos said during the interview. "Say give everybody 60 days or so to campaign and bring the issues to the people. I'm ready, I'm ready.

In Washington, White House spokesman Bill Hart said he would have no comment on Mr. Marcos' statements because the question of elections in the Philippines "is an internal matter." The statement was likely to raise eyebrows among many Filipinos, who say the United States has done "little else but meddle in our affairs lately," in the words of Manila columnist Teodoro Valencia.

Opposition leaders welcomed the announcement, and said former Sen. Salvador Laurel or Corazon Aquino, the widow of the slain Sen. Benigno Aquino, might oppose the president. Mr. Laurel is in Washington and will meet the press here tomorrow morning.

"There will only be one candidate of the opposition," Member of Parliament Homobono Adaza said early this morning. "I think it will be a choice between Cory and 'Doy' Laurel. Very likely I think it will be Doy."

Mr. Laurel's moderate views on the strategic U.S. naval and air bases in the Philippines and his former association with Mr. Marcos' ruling party are said to have alienated the vital youth vote.

Mrs. Aquino's position on the bases is unclear, although she has endorsed a plan for their eventual removal.

Mr. Marcos said he was confident he could convince the Legislature to call for the early election because his supporters control two-thirds of the membership.

"Anyone" would be able to participate in such an election, he said.

"You raise the question of the ineptness ... the effectiveness of armed forces ... perhaps the other institutions of the government," he said. "I think this should be brought to our people" to determine "what the people say about this question of support."

Mr. Marcos dismissed allegations that he was responsible for massive voter fraud in previous elections. "The opposition keeps kicking about fraud," Mr. Marcos said. "Of course it's a publicity stunt."

"How many people were disenfranchised... by the NPA, which is playing footsie with the opposition?" Mr. Marcos asked, referring to the communist insurgent New People's Army.

He said members of the U.S. Congress would be invited to observe the election.

The Reagan administration is becoming increasingly concerned about the growing communist insurgency in the Philippines. During a recent visit to Manila, Sen. Paul Laxalt conveyed to Mr. Marcos President Reagan's concerns about the situation in the Philippines.

Mr. Laxalt, Nevada Republican, reported that Mr. Marcos assured him he would take "some positive steps" toward political and military reforms to defuse the situation. Mr. Laxalt said the Filipino leader's pledge yesterday was "exciting."

"What's going on in the Philippines is a crisis of confidence, based on the perception that he doesn't have the political support of his people, and I just think he did the right thing," Mr. Laxalt said.

Rep. Stephen Solarz, New York Democrat, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee concerned with U.S.-Philippine relations, called Mr. Marcos' announcement a "potentially significant development."

Mr. Marcos repeated his pledge to reinstate Philippine armed forces chief Gen. Fabian Ver if he is acquitted on conspiracy charges stemming from the August 1983 assassination of opposition leader Mr. Aquino, who was killed as he stepped off a plane at Manila's airport, accompanied by military guards.

"I have given my word, that if he is acquitted, he will be reinstated. But I never promised for how long he would stay," Mr. Marcos said.

But for the first time, Mr. Marcos indicated a willingness to reorganize the Philippine armed forces, often criticized for corruption and ineffectiveness in the fight against the guerrillas.

"Perhaps we can work out with the military some kind of reorganization of the military," he said. "It's due, anyway."

On Friday, Sen. David Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said Mr. Marcos was incapable of bringing about reform and should step down.

The committee made public a report citing the growing momentum of the NPA, the military arm of the Philippine Communist Party, and predicted that the Philippines had less than three years to make basic changes before civil unrest and the insurgency bring down the government.

Edward Neilan in Washington contributed to this article.

Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/01/18 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000200760006-4